

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

/062 W

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R 031725Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1157

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E.O.32-11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, CO

SUBJECT: CHAMBER ELECTS LIBERAL COMPTROLLER; CONSERVATIVE  
CRITICISM SUBDUED

REF: BOGOTA 8019

1. AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF DELAY, THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ELECTED A COMPTROLLER-GEN ON OCT 1. PURSUING A DECISION  
REACHED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, THE OVERWHELMING LIBERAL MAJORITY ELECTED  
AS COMPTROLLER A LIBERAL MEMBER OF THE CHAMBER, ANIBAL MARTINEZ  
ZULETA, IN SPITE OF A VERY STRONG LAST MINUTE APPEAL FROM PRES LOPEZ  
TO CHAMBER PRESIDENT ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO THAT THE LIBERAL HONOR LOPZ  
CAMPAIGN COMMITMENT TO PUT A CONSERVATIVE IN THAT POST. IN A LETTER

FFT#

YQWDMI# DELIVERED DURING THE MORNING OF OCT 1, FOLLOWING AN  
EARLIER SUCH APPEAL LAST AUGUST (SEE REF), PRESIDENT LOPEZ SAID "MY  
OBLIGATION AS HEAD OF MY PARTY IS TO DIRECT, GUIDE AND FIX POSITIONS".

AND HE SAID "NOW MORE THAN EVER THE PEACE DEPENDS ON THE IDENTITY  
BETWEEN WORDS AND ACTS AND BETWEEN WHAT IS DECLARED AND DONE".

2. MEANWHILE ON SEPT 30 THE OUTGOING COMPTROLLER ENRIQUE  
ESCALLON, ALSO A LOBERAL, WAS ORDERED BY THE SUPREME COURT TO  
STAND TRIAL FOR EMBEZZLEMENT AND FALSIFICATION DURING HIS TENURE.

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3. COMMENT: PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT ONE OF THE PRIMARY AIMS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION IS TO RESTORE PUBLIC FAITH IN GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS. THE OFFICE OF THE COMPT GEN HAS LONG BEEN REGARDED BY MANY AS ONE OF THE MOST CORRUPT INSTITUTIONS IN COLOMBIA. THE TRIAL OF ESCALLON AND THE ELECTION OF A LIBERAL BY LIBERALS TO REPLACE ESCALLON, AGAINST PRESIDENT LOPEZ WISHES, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ADD TO PUBLIC SUSPICION OF THE MOTIVES OF LIBERAL REPRESENTATIVES WHO UNDOUBTEDLY WERE RESPONDING IN PART TO THE PORK-BARREL ASPECTS OF THE COMPTROLLER-GENERALSHIP. YET, THE CONSERVATIVES WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ABLE TO CAPITALIZE GREATLY ON THESE DEVELOPMENTS, SINCE MANY OF THEM HAVE CONSISTENTLY PRAISED ESCALLON'S PERFORMANCE AS COMPTROLLER. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT LOPEZ APPEARED TO BE ATTEMPTING TO LIVE UP TO HIS CAMPAIGN COMMITMENT HE DID NOT DO THE NECESSARY ARM-TWISTING TO BE SUCCESSFUL. LIBERALS IN THE CHAMBER TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THEY NEEDED THIS "VICTORY" TO DEMONSTRATE THE AUTONOMY OF THE CHAMBER AND TO REGAIN AN INITIATIVE LACKING OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. DURING THE LAST 14 YEARS, SUCCESSIVE CHAMBERS HAD BEEN UNABLE TO AGREE ON A COMPTROLLER, AND HAD INSTEAD GRANTED SEVERAL PRESIDENTS AUTHORITY TO APPOINT COMPTROLLERS

BY DECREE. APPARENTLY THE CONSERVATIVES ARE SATISFIED THAT THE PRESIDENT DID WHAT HE COULD IN A HIGHLY CHARGED SITUATION. RECOGNIZING

THE FUTILITY OF THEIR CASE, THE CONSERVATIVES DID NOT EVEN PRESENT A CANDIDATE UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT. THEIR CRITICISM, WHICH HAS BEEN RATHER SUBDUED, HAS BEEN DIRECTED AGAINST THE CHAMBER LIBERALS. AS SO OFTEN IS THE CASE IN COLOMBIA, POLITICIANS HAVE CONVERTED A POTENTIAL ISSUE INTO A NON-ISSUE.  
VAKY

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## Message Attributes

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**To:** STATE  
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